

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:53 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The Of-

fice of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Martin Torrijos Espino of Panama September 17, 2008

President Bush. Mr. President, thank you for coming. It's—*bienvenidos*.

President Torrijos. Yes.

President Bush. Yes. President Torrijos has been a good personal friend, and he has been a good friend to freedom, prosperity, and democracy. I've been very impressed by your leadership.

The Panamanian economy is strong. They are implementing now a very strategic decision, which is the—building a parallel canal in Panama. I remember when you first explained it to me there, when I went to visit you, I was most impressed. And then you're here now briefing me that the plans are not only in place, but the operations are beginning soon. And I congratulate you for that.

We've talked about bilateral issues. One key issue, of course, is the free trade agreement between the United States and Panama. Congress needs to get it done. This is important for our—both our nations, it's important for our economies, and it's important for our friendship. And I appreciate you coming to talk to Members of Congress. I think it is most useful.

And so it's a joy to be with you again, and I'm proud to have you here. And I pledge to you that I will continue to work hard on this important agreement, and I will. Welcome.

President Torrijos. Thank you, sir. Thank you. It's always a pleasure talking to you and looking at our bilateral relations. They have grown stronger. There's a lot of issues of cooperation in the agenda, cooperation that will make a difference to common people in Panama: health programs, the regional center that's been established in Panama, educational programs that we're talking, and of course, our commitment to free trade and, as you said, the commitment that we hope we'll be ready to help in any way to—in the process.

And I just want to thank you for being a friend of the country, being aware of our problem, and reaching out to help the Panamanian people. So thank you, sir.

President Bush. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:54 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at the Iftaar Dinner September 17, 2008

Good evening, and welcome. Over the past 8 years, we have made the Iftaar dinner an annual tradition here at the White

House, and I'm really glad we did. At this year's gathering, we pay special tribute to the many contribution Muslim Americans